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SUBJECT: Alex Segura - The Scandal Continues

REF: Dakar 1279

¶1. (SBU) Summary: After revelations that former IMF Resident Representatives, Alex Segura, left Senegal with a Presidential cash gift valued in the neighborhood of USD 200,000, local media and opposition leaders have continued to slam President Abdoulaye Wade for what they call his crass attempt to bribe the IMF and the consequent tarnishing of Senegal's image. In turn, Wade has obfuscated, twisted the facts, and blamed others for this incident. Finally, in a fit of pique, Wade marched out of a press conference when journalists kept haranguing him about his role in what has now been dubbed "l'Affaire Segura." End Summary.

The Story So Far

¶2. (SBU) On October 9 2009, Senegalese media broke the news that Alex Segura was caught in Paris carrying a suitcase filled with, which at the time, they claimed exceeded CFA 500 million. Since then, the political and media scene has been ablaze in debate about whether or not this was an attempt to bribe or frame Segura or if President Wade went overboard in his gift-giving. The Senegalese authorities initially responded through the Minister of communication, Mr. Mustafa Guirassy, who contradicted the news stories stating that "the government of Senegal had nothing to do with this affair."
But...

¶3. (SBU) The government began to scramble for answers and excuses when, on October 26, the IMF released a communique confirming that Segura received a substantial sum of money from President Wade at the time of his departure from Senegal on September 25, denying his arrest in Paris by the French customs officers, and stating that Segura had reported everything to the IMF's ethics commission. The communique also revealed that the envelope contained EUR 100,000 and USD 50,000, a total of CFA 90 million (USD 200,000).

¶4. (SBU) While the IMF communique neither absolved Segura nor berated the Senegalese government for anything at all, it directly contradicted the government's initial denial that any money had been given to Segura, as well as clarifying statements by Prime Minister Souleymane Ndene Ndiaye, who on the same day had said that only CFA 65 million was actually offered. The PM then dug himself into a bigger hole when he tried to blithely dismiss the amount as inconsequential, claiming, "It can't even buy you an apartment in Paris." Both Foreign Minister Madick Niang and the Prime Minister then attempted to limit the extent of the damage by saying that it was an unimportant farewell gift and that gift-giving was "a tradition in Africa."

Finally the President Speaks

14. (SBU) After weeks of maneuvering, President Wade has now been forced to admit that he did give the money to Segura, but, as was expected, he Pontius Pilated himself out of the story by offering his Aide De Camp, Colonel Cissokho, as a scapegoat, claiming that the Colonel had made a mistake in the amount that was supposed to have been given. In a statement released Tuesday 27 October, Wade said the gift was most definitely not a bribe as "Segura was not a friend to Senegal because he never missed an opportunity to publically denounce my government." The president explained that the money was intended as a recognition of his contribution to Senegal, and was not in any way intended to influence him, "When someone has remained a long time with us, then it is our tradition to offer a gift, either in kind or in a modest sum of money so he can buy himself and his family souvenirs." President Wade confirmed that he had told IMF Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn, during a phone call, that he had made a monumental error. He also confirmed that the money has been returned to the Senegalese authorities.

15. (SBU) In response, some opposition parties are asking that President Wade resign, saying that he has irreparably tainted Senegal's image, while others are going as far as saying that he should be impeached for high treason. The Socialist Party has asked that the United Nations be tasked with carrying out an independent investigation.

16. (SBU) Comment: This story has legs and it is likely that, despite the President having walked out of a press conference in frustration at being asked questions about "l'Affaire Segura," the opposition will use it to attack him endlessly as another example of the endemic corruption of his government. While it will be difficult to work out what really happened, Senegal's image is tainted. Some international donors have already noted that the time may be ripe to

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push a weakened and reeling President Wade to enact some serious reforms to curb corruption in his Administration. End Comment.

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